

OF
Religious Discourse
IN
Common Conversation.

IN THREE PARTS.

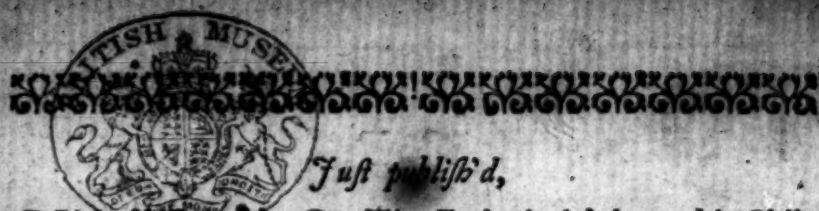
By *JOHN NORRIS*, M. A.
Late Rector of *Bemerton*, near
Sarum.

THE TENTH EDITION.

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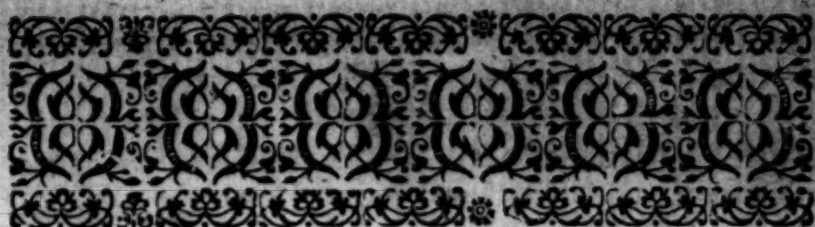
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Of Religious Discourse in Common Conversation.

IN THREE PARTS.

P S A L. XXXVII. 30.

*The Mouth of the Righteous speaketh Wisdom,
and his Tongue talketh of Judgment.*



H I S it seems was the Character of a good Man in King *David's* Time; he was known by his good Discourse; and if it be not so now, 'tis either because Mens Thoughts are not so good as they were then, or because we are mightily gone off from the Plainness and Simplicity of that Age, and are not so much disposed to speak what we think. However it be, it may seem at first somewhat strange that when Religion was more in the *Hearts* of Men, at a further Distance from the Tongue, it should hold such a strict Correspondence with it, and now 'tis got into the *Head*, and so more within its Neighbourhood, it should be yet such a Stranger to it. But when I think again my Wonder ceases. For

tho' the Tongue has its *Dwelling* in the *Head*, it has its *Motion* from the *Heart*. And so our Saviour tells us, *Mat. 12. 34.* that *out of the Abundance of the Heart the Mouth speaketh*. But we no where read that out of the Abundance of the *Head* the Mouth speaketh. Nor do we find it so by Experience, but rather the contrary, Silence being the common Effect of much Knowledge. Let a Man's Head be never so full, and it may continue so without aching, but if his Heart be full, it must discharge it self or break. Thus 'tis not only observ'd, but even complain'd of studious and contemplative Men, that tho' their Heads be never so plentifully furnish'd with what they read and think, they can yet forbear talking of it, and commonly do so, those of them that think and know most, being remarkable for speaking least, which makes their Conversation so insignificant and unedifying as generally it is. But 'tis not so with *Lovers*, nor yet with the Men of the World. They are not so reserv'd and lock'd up, but will be continually talking of their several *Mistresses*, and fancy the Subject as acceptable to others as it is to themselves, so that you may quickly know what they are, and which is their dominant and governing Passion by their Discourse. All Love is talkative, and tho' the Head can be so contentedly silent, the Heart cannot. When that is full of any thing, even the Dumb cannot forbear speaking, and the Passion that loosens their Tongues will also make them eloquent. And because good Men have their Hearts and Minds as much set upon Goodness, as the Men of the World have theirs upon worldly and carnal Objects, since the Love of God and of Virtue is their great Passion, and Religion the Weight and Bias of their Souls, hence 'tis that the Vein of their Discourse runs altogether upon that

that Strain, and while Vanity and Folly, Sin and Impertinence are the beaten Subjects of ordinary Conversation, *The Mouth of the Righteous speaketh Wisdom, and his Tongue talketh of Judgment.*

I NEED not bestow any critical Nicety upon the Words *Wisdom* and *Judgment*, so frequently used in Scripture, which takes no Notice by way of Commendation of any Wisdom but what serves to the Government of a Man's Life, and the Salvation of his Soul, and which commonly uses Judgment for Justice and Equity, as also more at large for the Rules and Precepts of Morality and good Life in general: And that it signifies so here, sufficiently appears from the following Part of this Character of a good Man in the next Verse, *The Law of his God is in his Heart.* From which put together, the Intent of the Psalmist seems to be to characterize a good Man by this Property, that he is one that is wont upon all Occasions to season even his ordinary Conversation with good wholesome Discourse, some pious and religious Matter or other, that may serve to enlighten and edify those that hear him, and make them the wiser and the better for his Company.

THE Subject then that I am led to treat of upon the Occasion of these Words, is, *Of Religious Discourse in Ordinary Conversation.* For the fuller and more distinct Consideration of which my present Undertaking shall be,

FIRST, To enquire into the Reasons why Discourse about Religion is so much disused, even by good Men, in common Conversation.

SECONDLY, To shew the Insufficiency of those Reasons, and that to season his Discourse with the Things of Religion is one real Part of the Duty of Man.

A 3 THIRDLY,

THIRDLY, To shew that those who are very good indeed, and have a due thorough Sense of Religion, will have Regard to this Practice, and at least in some considerable Measure, exercise themselves in it. So making good the Character given of them by the Psalmist, *The Mouth of the Righteous speaketh Wisdom, and his Tongue talketh of Judgment.*

AND first for the Reasons of the
Part I. Difuse of Religion in Discourse. And here in the first Place, I take it for granted that I am not going to account for an imaginary Defect, or Neglect in *Idea* only, but that the Case supposed is real, that to talk of Religion is indeed very much difused and out of Fashion, and that among People of laudable Character, and otherwise good and virtuous. Not that the Articles, Points, Questions, and Controversies of Religion are so pass'd over in Silence: No, There was always Noise and Clamour enough about them, and never more than now, tho' there be but little Truth gain'd, and a great deal of Charity lost in the Contention. But 'tis not the notional but the practical Part of Religion, whose Difuse in Conversation I complain of. Men do indeed talk of Religion, but not of that which is practical, nor in a practical Way; that is, I mean after such a serious and devotional Manner as to put one another in remembrance of the great Concernments of a good Life, and of that two-fold Eternity which depends upon it, and to stir one another up to the Works of Piety and Charity, and the Exercise of such Christian Graces as are necessary both to carry them to Heaven, and to qualify them for the Enjoyment of it. Do Men talk thus of Religion? No, Wicked Men cannot, and good Men

Men (unless they be very good indeed, whose Number, God knows, a few Figures will serve to cast up) for some certain Reasons too often decline it. So that between them both, what thro' the Indisposition of the one, and the Incapacity of the other, a Man may make Visit after Visit, go from House to House, out of one Company into another, for it may be a Twelvemonth together, and never hear one Word of Religion pass, unless it be (as was hinted before) by way of Wrangle and Dispute, and that indeed unless he stop his Ears, he can hardly avoid, if he can then. But as for any serious and edifying Discourse about it, whither shall a Man go, unless it be to Church, to hear any such Thing? All the Discourse of the World runs upon the Things of the World, such as News, Trade, Business, Learning, not to say any thing of lesser and meaner Subjects that imploy Gossiping and Cenforious Tongues. And these Things make the great Buz and Hum of the City. But as for Religion there is in all this Hurry such an universal Hush and Silence about it, that were it not for our Books of Devotion and our Churches, (those two Providential Monuments and Preservatives of declining Piety) a Stranger would hardly know whether there were any Religion among us. Sure I am it would be a great While before he would find it by our Discourse; and were he to pick it out by that, for ought I know, he might learn our Language much sooner. It looks in my Mind as if Religion had a Kind of *Imbargo* laid upon it, and Men were under a Prohibition to talk of it, and to forfeit some Penalty to the Government if they did. Were this the Case, I am confident they could not be more silent concerning it than they are, and considering the Bent of our Inclination to what is forbid, I question whether they would be so much!

A N D yet Men profess Religion all this while, express a decent Regard towards it, and pretend to believe the weighty Doctrines of it, the Being of God, the Resurrection of the Body, the Immortality of the Soul, and the two great Eternities. And is it not strange then that they should never talk of these Things? Should but any two of these Men travel together upon the Road, especially if to a Place of considerable Note, and which they were never at before, and where they were ever after to dwell, how often would they talk of it before they got to it! Now is not this exactly our Case? We are all Travelers, and our Life is but a Journey, and we are bound not for a little Town or City, but for another World, to which we are perfect Strangers at present, and in which we are to take up our happy or miserable Abode for ever. And is it not then very strange that Men should travel on together Day after Day, for many Years following, upon a Journey of such Consequence as this, and never entertain themselves upon the Road with what all other Travellers do, Discourse about their Journey's End, and the right Way that leads to it. That a Thing that is so much every Body's Concern, should be almost no Body's Discourse. Is not this a Wonder? Yes, it is the very greatest that I know of in the World. But then this makes it the more necessary to consider the Reasons of so strange a Conduct.

A N D here I think in the first Place 'tis very plain and obvious why wicked Men talk no more of Religion, even because they have none to talk of. The Reason why there is so little of it in their Mouths, is because there is less of it in their Hearts. When there are so many other Subjects that are more agreeable to their Tastes, they have no Heart to talk of a Thing they have neither

ther Notion nor relish of themselves, and which would but lull their jolly Company asleep. And truly 'tis no great Matter whether they do or no, since they must needs do it with a very ill Grace, and to very little Purpose. Religion has no Advantage from the Commendations of those whose Lives are a constant Satyr upon it, and they do it Dishonour enough by their bare Profession of it, and therefore need not add to that the further Disgrace of their Discourse. And unless they owe it a Spite, and have a Mind either to affront that or their Company, sure they will not. For certainly the religious Discourse of him cannot be very decent to Men, whose *Religion* it self, whose very *Prayer* is an Abomination to God, and if a *Parable*, as *Solomon* says, *Prov. 26. 7. be not comely in the Mouth of a Fool, much less is Religion in the Mouth of an ill Man.* But I think we may excuse them here, it being a Fault they are very rarely guilty of, unless it be upon two particular Occasions, when they are either *drunk* or about to *die*, and then indeed you shall have some of them very devoutly given, and much for talking of Religion, but at other Times they studiously baulk and decline it as too flat a Subject for their gay Spirits.

BUT 'tis not worth while to consider any longer what these Men do, or upon what Grounds and Motives they act. It is of more Consequence to inquire into the Grounds and Reasons of the great Disuse of religious Discourse among good Men. And here tho' I doubt not but that this is in great Measure to be ascrib'd to want of Goodness too as well as in the other sort, or which is all one, to the Imperfection of it, since, as will be made appear under the Third Part, those who have a due Sense of Religion, and a thorough Zeal for it, will shew it by their Discourse, yet because
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the Men I am now speaking of, tho' not the very best, are yet suppos'd to be good, and so must have a true Love and Value for Religion, and consequently must be suppos'd willing enough of themselves to talk of it, were there not some Discouragements from without that did hinder them from so doing, I think it more material at present to consider what those unhappy Discouragements are. The most ordinary and most prevailing of which I take to be these Three.

1. *The Contempt that is generally cast upon good Men.*
2. *The Fear of being thought Hypocrites.*
3. *Shame of being out of the Mode or Fashion.*

1. *The Contempt that is generally cast upon good Men.* Not that I think an ill Man can possibly despise a good Man in his Heart. No, he has a secret Esteem and Veneration for him there, and as he would willingly die the Death, so he inwardly honours the Life of the Righteous. But yet for all this wicked Men have still so much of their Father the Devil in them, that they are loath to be unhappy alone, and take a solitary Journey to Hell, and are therefore for securing as much Company thither before hand as they can. And in order to this they endeavour to fix a Mark of Ignominy and Disgrace upon Religion, and treat those that openly profess and practise it with Scorn and Contempt, thinking by their ridiculing Scoffs and Flouts either to laugh them out of it, or at least to discourage them from such an open Acknowledgment, and visible Expression of it as shall do them or their hellish Cause any Hurt. Their Plot is against the very Being and Life of Religion, and if by this Means they cannot extinguish its vital Heat, yet they hope at least to stifle

stifle its Light, and hinder it from *shining*. So that if Men will be good and virtuous they shall be so to themselves, and make no Shew of their Piety to shame and upbraid those that have none, or to confirm those that have. This is their devilish Policy, and with the Devil's Help they too often succeed in it, having besides that Advantage a very strong Passion in human Nature on their Side. For there is nothing that Men more naturally love than Esteem, and nothing that they more naturally hate, and can less bear, than Contempt, And since this Contempt is thus maliciously intail'd upon Goodness, this makes good Men backward to discourse of Religion, for fear they should meet with it, and so, with the Psalmist, *Psal. 39.* they hold their Mouth as it were with a Bridle, while the Ungodly are in their Sight, and keep Silence, yea, even from good Words, tho' it be Pain and Grief to them. For 'tis against the natural Grain and Disposition of their Minds; but they are afraid to appear what they are, because of the Contempt that is annex'd to their Character, and therefore they chuse (tho' with inward Reluctance) to hide their Goodness, and wear a Disguise over it, as some whose Profession obliges them to another Sort of Habit, are said to travel sometimes in grey Coats, for fear of meeting with Affronts upon the Road. Why this is the very Case of good Men in the World. They dare not appear in their true Colours. But then, by the Way, is not the World come to a fine Pass, think ye, when Religion has so few Friends in it, that the Servants of Jesus Christ are afraid to wear their Master's Livery, least it should expose them to Affronts? But I forbear, and go on to the next Discouragement, which is,

2. *The Fear of being thought Hypocrites.* Hypocrisy is so odious a Vice that even the very Suspicion of it is intolerable, and the better any Man is, the more uneasy and insupportable it must be to him. As there can be nothing so fundamentally contrary to the Nature and Character of a good Man, so there is nothing so deeply resented, or justly dreaded by him, to whom it must be a far less Affliction to be thought altogether without Religion, than to be thought a Pretender to it when he has none. Now here's another Artifice of wicked Men against the Good and Pious. If they fail in their first Design, and cannot directly ridicule them out of their Religion, nor render them ridiculous for it, then they turn the Tables, and cry them down for *Hypocrites* and *Dissemblers*, and then they reckon they undermine the beautiful Fabrick of their Virtues at one Blow, and make them contemptible and odious all at once. And because this is so effectual an Engine, you shall often find them at work with it. When they see a Man carry any extraordinary Appearances, or express any uncommon Symptoms of Religion (and as the World goes, ordinary ones are now become such) either in his Actions, or in his Discourse, the next Word is, *I'll warrant you he is a Hypocrite*, and then they reckon they have done his Work, and their own too. Now tho' this be a most extravagant and unconscionable Way of censuring, to set Men down for Hypocrites, because they wear about them the Marks and Characters of Religion, yet I must needs confess, that a certain Sort of Men in the World have unhappily contributed too much Occasion to it, and Pretence for it, partly by their talking of Religion after such a canting, whining, awkward, and fantastical Manner, so as to betray the Want of it at the same Time;

Time; and partly by acting against it, while in their Discourse they seem'd so passionately zealous and concern'd for it, by being found wanting in the great Duties of Morality, and particularly to make bold with the Precepts of the *Second Table*, while they overflow'd with religious Sentences, dropt Scripture as they went, and had nothing but *God, Christ, and Heaven* in their Mouths. This awkward and nauseous Way of talking of Religion was enough of it self to make Men sick of it. But then the gross Immorality that usually went along with it, did so further prejudice and possess them against it, that whenever they heard Men begin any Discourse about Religion, they thought presently there was some Dishonesty a hatching, and that 'twas Time to look to their Pockets. By this Means good Communication was brought into discredit, the Palate of the World was disgusted at it, some were jealous of it, others afraid of it, and all conceiv'd a Prejudice and an Aversion against it, so that the holy Things of Religion fell at length into Contempt and Disrepute, nay, became an Abomination and an Offence, insomuch that (as 'tis said upon the Occasion of the Miscarriages of *Eli's Sons*) *Men abhorr'd the Offerings of the Lord*, 1 Sam. 2. 17. And as the Text moreover says, that the Sin of the young Men was great, so I doubt not but that the Men I speak of have a great deal to answer for the Prejudice they have done to the Interest of Religion, the general Disrelish and Distaste they have rais'd in Mens Minds against it, the Scandal they have laid in the Way of good Men, and the Advantage they have given to the bad, who have not fail'd to make the utmost Use and Improvement of it. For I cannot but look upon this as the chief Cause of the great Difuse of religious Discourse, of which even good
Men

Men are grown shy, asham'd, nay, even afraid, lest they should be thought guilty of that Hypocrisy which some of our late Pretenders were so notorious, and so infamous for. The short is, Men were got into a very odd and untoward Way of talking of Religion, and some of the greatest Talkers of it were withal observ'd to be some of the greatest Knaves, and to make use of their sanctify'd Discourse only as a Disguise to palliate, and as an Instrument to execute their Knavery, and this made honest and well-meaning Men avoid it, for fear they should be taken for Knaves and Hypocrites too. And the same Consideration has too great an Influence upon them still, and 'tis a Prejudice they cannot yet get over. But there is another considerable Objection behind, and that is,

3. *The Shame of being out of the Mode and Fashion of the World.* This Reason I put last, because it supposes religious Discourse to be already in Disuse for the Sake of the two former, and does not first make it so, but only adds more Weight to the already prevailing Scale. The Contempt that lies upon good Men, and the Fear of being taken for Hypocrites first jointly conspire to bring religious Discourse out of Fashion; and when it is so, then the Shame of being out of that Fashion contributes to the further Forbearance and Disuse of it. The Mode and Custom of the World is one of the most engaging and bewitching Things in it; one of the first that Fools learn, and one of the last that wise Men can find the Courage to dispise. 'Tis so in all Things, but in nothing so much as in Discourse, whose Conformity to Custom is reckon'd its greatest Elegance and Commendation, as well in the Choice of the Subject, as in the Use of Words and Phrases. Men usually talk not only according to the Tone and Dialect
of

of their several Countries, but upon those Subjects too that are most fashionable and creditable there. For you must know that there are certain modish Subjects as well as modish Expressions and Ways of Talking, and those different according to Diversity of Ages, Places, and Persons. The Courtier's Subject is Love and Gallantry, the Gentleman talks of his Country Sports and Recreations, the Tradesman of Business and Six to the Hundred, the Scholar, a little indeed more to the Purpose, of Books and Learning; but none of these talk of *Religion*; that's a stale, out-dated, antiquated, superannuated Subject, too dull and melancholly for the Gaity of this spruce and more accomplish'd Age, and a Man were as good be seen in an antick Dress, or with a Ruff about his Neck, as to have it in his Mouth. And accordingly those that have it in their Hearts, are apt to be very wary and cautious how they let it appear *there*. They see that the Humour of the World runs against them, that there are so many more pleasing and agreeable Subjects to talk of, that Religion can find no Place, and is in a manner shut out of all Conversation, that the Great and the Wise, the Well-bred and the Learned, and even the Good too, very gravely pass it over, and they are loth to be singular, and know not how indeed to begin an unwelcome Discourse, upon an unmodish Subject, and which, if they should, no body would second them in, or thank them for; or perhaps so much as give them a patient Hearing; and so partly out of Caution and prudent Regard to themselves, and partly out of good Breeding and Respect to their Company, they very mannerly and civilly let it alone. And by this Means it comes to pass that other Channels are cut out for our Discourse, which runs upon all the Subjects in the World besides, whether great or
little,

little, good or bad, so that nothing can escape the Reach and Compass of our Talk, while in the mean Time, Religion, which is the Glory of our Natures, the End of our Beings, the noblest Object of our Thoughts, the greatest Concernment of our Lives, and the best Employment of our Tongues, is yet confin'd to the Closet, and dares not appear Abroad, or breathe in the open Air, but like a Lamp in an Urn, is forced to burn under Ground, and to shine within its little subterraneous Inclosure, where none can see or enjoy its Light. The World in short is come to this, that that Freedom, Openness, and Ingenuity that belongs to Religion and Virtue, is usurp'd by Vice and Wickedness; and that Guilt, Shame, and Reservedness, which is proper and due only to Vice, is by a strange Combination and Agreement imposed upon Religion; so that as excellent a Thing as it is, even those that have it are asham'd to own it, but every Man keeps it as a *Fairy-Treasure* to himself, as if he were to lose either *that* or his *Credit* by the Discovery. And thus have I laid before you the principal Reasons of the great Disuse of Religion in our common Discourse. And lest they should be thought to justify that unhappy Effect which they so ordinarily produce, I come now in the next Place,

Part II. SECONDLY, To shew the Insufficiency of these Reasons, and that to season his Discourse with the Things of Religion is one real Part of the Duty of Man. And first as to the *Contempt* that so usually waits upon Goodness, what is there in it that should so much as move a Person of Sense and Discretion, (which I suppose every good Man in some Measure to be) when he considers that 'tis only *Contempt*, that is, only an Opinion, which being a Thought of the
Mind

Kind may indeed express it self in Words, Looks, and supercilious Behaviour, but can neither wound the Flesh, nor break the Bones, nor make the Object of it any further unhappy than he pleases. For when all's done, 'tis not another's Thought concerning a Man, but his own that must afflict him, and make him uneasy, and if he can but master his own Reflection, he may at once defy and despise the other's Opinion. As he may easily do, if he considers further, that 'tis not only mere Contempt, but the Contempt of an ill Man, who for the same Reason to be sure is so ill a Judge, that his good Character would be the truest Scandal, and if he thought never so honourably of a deserving Person, it would be that Person's Interest to bribe him to keep his Opinion to himself. But then again, 'tis not only bare Contempt, and that of an ill Man, but an ill Man's Contempt of one that is good, and therefore worthy of the highest Honour and Esteem, and that for doing what belongs to him as such, for acting according to his excellent Nature and Character. 'Tis as if one should despise *Light* for *shining*. And can there be any thing more contemptible, as well as absurd, than such a Contempt, unless it be the Author of it? All this I speak upon Supposition, that an ill Man could possibly despise one whom he thinks truly good: But what if he cannot? What if all this Contempt (as 'was remark'd before) be nothing but in shew and external Treatment, nothing but a forc'd acting of an uncivil Part, while at the same time he secretly honours and reverences him within himself? What a poor despicable Thing must this empty Shadow of Disrespect then appear, how unworthy, I will not say of a good Man's Concern, but even of his very Notice and Consideration!

THE N in the next Place, as to the Fear of being thought a *Hypocrite*, I will readily allow it to be as bad a Thought as one Man can possibly entertain of another (which by the way should make Men tender and cautious how they proceed to so severe a Censure) but then 'tis no more than a *Thought*, and that commonly of the more rash and hasty as well as disaffected Judges, and in the present Case a very unjust one, there being no rational Ground why any Man should be thought guilty of Hypocrisy for talking religiously, unless he betray it himself, either by the affected and fantastick Manner of his Discourse, or by the visible Demonstration of a contrary Life. Religious talking absolutely consider'd and in it self, is no natural Sign of Hypocrisy, but of the contrary, for who should talk of Religion but those that have a deep Sense of it, and are animated with its Power and Spirit? There is, I know, a Way of Talking, or rather, *Prating* of Religion, which may justly expose a Man to that Suspicion, but truly if a Man discourse of it seriously, gravely, soberly, and unaffectedly, and does not appear to bely his Discourse by his Practice, whatever wicked and envious Men may out of Malice or Policy give out, I can hardly believe that they who call him Hypocrite with their Mouths, do in their Hearts really think him so. But whether they do or no, what great Matter is it, and what need a good Man be so much concern'd to be thought or censur'd as a Hypocrite by a Company of fallible Creatures at best, and for the most part Fools and Sots, when he is conscious to himself of his own Sincerity, and can with Boldness appeal to the great infallible Judge, for the Truth and Integrity of his Heart.

THE N lastly, As to the *Shame* of being out of the *Mode* and *Fashion*, this one would think
 should

should be even to an ordinary Measure of Wisdom and Goodness, a very vincible and surpassable Discouragement. For alas what is a Mode or Fashion, but only a continued and settled Practice of a great many? A Mode implies only Matter of *Fact*, not of *Reason* or *Right*. 'Tis not what a great many should do, but what they do do, and for some considerable Time continue to do. For there are two Things that go to the making of a Mode or Fashion, the Practice of a great many, and the Continuation and Settlement of that Practice. The Practice of a few does not make a Fashion, nor of a great many if it have not some Continuance. But now that a Thing be done for a long Time, or by a great many, (besides that those *Many*, tho' the major, are generally the least considerable Part of Mankind) is so casual and fortuitous a Thing, and that depends upon so many little Accidents and Contingencies, not to say Whimsies and Caprices, that the World had need be much another Thing than it is, to deserve that a wise Man should pay any great Deference to any of its Fashions. Indeed, did Men always act considerately, and upon Principles of Sense and Reason, nay, even according to the best of that Understanding which they have, the Case would be very different; but as they are pleas'd now to order the Matter, that which we call the Fashion of the World, is little better than the Humour of the World, and what great Regard is there due to that? Something indeed there is in it, so much, that a Man would not willingly be out of the Mode when he might be as well in it, but would comply with it as far as he might innocently and reasonably, and not be singular for nothing. But yet after all, a Mode that has no natural Reason or Ground, but only mere Custom and Use to support it, is but a very little Thing.

And what then is an ill Mode, a Mode that is against all Sense and Reason and Religion too, and that tends to the Discouragement and Suppression, I may say Extinction of that little Piety that is left among us? And what Reason is there that a good Man (one of whose principal Characters is, *Not to be conform'd to the Course of the World*) should decline discoursing of the only Subject that's worth talking of, for fear of transgressing such a Mode? But the Mischief of it is, Fools begin Fashions, and wise Men not only follow, but authorize them.

AND thus you see how slight and trivial these mighty Objections are, when they come to be look'd into, which discourage so many good Men from talking of Religion, and wihal, by the Way, what little Things will hinder us from doing that which is Good. But suppose they were never so considerable otherwise and in themselves, yet what are they, and how little ought they to be regarded, when they come in Competition with a Man's Duty! I say a Man's *Duty*, for so I call it, and shall now prove it to be, from the three great Heads of the Duty of every Man, that to Himself, that to his Neighbour, and that to God,

AND First, 'tis a Duty that every Man owes to *Himself*. The great and general Duty that every Man owes to himself, is to consult the Perfection of his rational Nature, and to provide for the eternal Happiness of his Soul. And the next to that, is to use all those Means which directly lead to that End, and have a near Connexion with it. Now as a holy and religious Frame and Temper of Mind is the nearest and most immediate Means to that, so there is nothing that does more naturally conduce to cherish and keep up in a Man a warm and vital Sense of Religion, than frequently to talk of it. Meditation upon good Things is indeed

deed of excellent Use to this Purpose, and accordingly the Psalmist makes it one Part of the good Man's Character, *Psal. 1.* that he *Meditates in the Law of God Day and Night.* And so in the Verse after the Text it is said of him, that *The Law of his God is in his Heart.* But yet however, religious Thoughts when they are confin'd to the Mind, and transacted only in the Scene of the Imagination, have not half that Influence upon the Man, as when they are cloath'd with Words, and are audibly utter'd by the Tongue. Meditation is a great Improvement to a *Scholar*, but yet to discourse over, and communicate his Notions to another, serves yet further to improve him, and lets in new and more Light into his Thoughts. And so 'tis in Religion, to think and meditate of it silently to ones self, is, no Doubt, a very comfortable and edifying Practice; but yet when we talk of it to another, it makes a deeper Impression upon us, and we are quite otherwise affected with it than when we mused upon it privately by our selves alone. And indeed, let a Man retire into his Closet never so duly, and imploy himself there never so devoutly, in Prayer, Meditation, and Communion with God, yet to have no body to talk to of Religion afterwards when he comes forth, nor to hear it talk'd of, must needs be a great Damp to him, and if not quite unbend, must yet however very much *slacken* the *Spring* of his Devotion. Which, by the Way, is the great Disadvantage of *Hermits* and solitary Recluses. Their Light shines only through an empty Medium, without meeting with any Body in its Way to return it, and so wants the Reflection of its own Beams. They may have a good Principle of spiritual Life in them, but the heavenly Plant is too much freightned and bound up to thrive, and cannot shoot forth its Branches very far (how good soever its Root may be) for
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want of Liberty and Room. But then where's the Difference in this Respect betwixt living in a Desert and in the World, since Religion is in a manner as little discours'd of in the one as in the other? Why truly the Odds is not much, save only that what is actually thus in Society, as Men are pleas'd to order it, must of Necessity be so in perfect Solitude, and that in the World, as wicked and ill order'd as it is, a Man may possibly meet with a Correspondent in Piety with whom he may traffick and negotiate in the Affairs of Heaven, which in a Desert he cannot, but till he does do so, his Case is the same with that of a Hermit, (only in some Respects a great deal worse, as liable to the Assaults of bad Discourse, as well as to the Want of good) and his Religion has the very same Disadvantage to contend with. And that truly a very great one. For even Fire it self will languish and go out if it want Air, and so will Devotion too if it have not Vent by good Discourse, which fans and ventilates its holy Fire, and serves (even as much as Fuel it self) to nourish and keep it alive. And I cannot but reckon the Want of this among the chief Causes of the great and long lamented Decay of Christian Piety. For Conversation is the very Air and Breath, I had almost said the *Lungs*, of Religion, without which it will be in Danger of being stifled and choak'd up, but with which it will glow, and flame out, and burn bright. And therefore since to talk of Religion is an Exercise that tends so much to the Advantage of it, every Man certainly owes so much at least to himself, and the Care of his own Soul, as frequently to use and practise it. But further,

SECONDLY, 'Tis also a Duty that every Man owes to his *Neighbour*; whom he is bound to love as himself, and whose spiritual Welfare therefore he is to regard and set forward as he would do his own.

own. Now he cannot express this his charitable Regard to his Neighbour better, nor promote his Soul's Health and Happiness more than by using pious and religious Discourse to him in his ordinary Conversation with him. For as evil Communication corrupts good Manners, so good Communication will reform evil Ones, and make them that are Good better. And since wicked Men, those Emissaries of the Devil, are so busy to season those they converse with, what they can, with the hellish Leaven of their lewd, profane, and immoral Talk, why should not good Men, if 'twere only to countermine the others Wickedness, think themselves as much concern'd to dispose Men to Goodness by their pious Discourse? Not that after all they can reasonably hope to do as much Good by their wholesome, as the others do Mischief by their poisonous Breath, because these latter row with the Stream, and have the Bias of corrupt Nature on their Side. But however, a great deal of Good may be done, and if any Thing will reform the World, and revive in it the old Evangelick Spirit of Primitive Piety, it must be good familiar Discourse. For besides the many particular good Offices that may be done with it by informing the Ignorant, by awakening those that do not consider nor practise what they know, by quickening the Lukewarm, by comforting the Afflicted, and the like, there is this general Advantage that will further accrue by it to Mankind, People will see and be convinc'd that there is a Sense of Religion in the World (which truly they are tempted to question when they hear no body talk of it) and that there are some in it that in spite of all the Discouragements of a perverse and corrupt Age, dare own and stand by the Cause of God, do not scruple to declare what Master they serve, by wearing his Livery, are neither asham'd of
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what they profess, nor afraid of any ill Consequences of professing it, which must needs be a great Comfort, Incouragement and Edification to all that are Witnesses of such a truly great and noble Instance of Christian Bravery. And truly as easy and as pleasant as the Paths of Piety and Religion are, a little Company would do well in the Way to Heaven, as well as upon other Roads, and there is no Traveller so active and full of Spirit, but what would travel better in Society with others, than all alone by himself, *Prov. 27. 17.* *As Iron sharpeneth Iron, so a Man sharpeneth the Countenance of his Friend*, says Solomon; that is, quickens and enlivens him, and sets a new Edge both upon his Wit, and upon his Passions and Affections. 'Tis so in other Things as well as in Religion, but most of all in Religion, the Impressions of which nothing will make enter so deep, or remain so long in the Hearts of Men, as the serious and frequent Use of it in ordinary Discourse. I say *Ordinary* Discourse. For to talk of it upon solemn Occasions only, looks too much like a *Formality*, and tho' good Books and Sermons be of excellent Use, and may here and there do a great deal of Good, yet they are but dead Things in comparison of those *living Births* of Piety that come from the Mouth in Conversation, when Hearts truly toucht with the Love of God communicate their Light and Heat, and blow up one anothers dormant Fires into a burning and shining Flame. And therefore since there is so much Edification in religious Discourse, the great Advantage that accrues to our Neighbour as well as to our selves by it, may serve as another Argument both to oblige, and to persuade us to the Practice of it. But we are yet further to consider,

THIRDLY, That 'tis also a Duty that every Man owes to God, for whose Glory he was made,
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and whose Honour and Glory by the great Law and End of his Creation he is to seek and advance, and which he cannot better promote than by religious Discourse, by talking honourably of God, and speaking good of his Name, by representing the Excellency of his Being and Nature, the Order and Wisdom, the Justice and Goodness of his Government, the Reasonableness and Equity of his Laws, the Pleasantness and perfect Freedom of his Service, the great Instances of his fatherly Love and Kindness to us here, and the glorious Rewards that he has prepared and reserves for us hereafter, besides those more direct and immediate Glorifications of God, which consist in Acts of *Praise and Thanksgiving*, which by themselves make a good Part of religious Discourse. By these we shall render God and his Ways lovely and amiable in the Eyes of the World, win over Subjects to his Government, set up his Kingdom in their Hearts, raise religious Sentiments in the Minds of Men, and stir 'em up to the Love, Fear, Worship, and Adoration of the Great and Good God, and to express their devotional Affections to him in Conformity to his Will, and in Obedience to his Laws, which after all is the truest Honour and Glorification of God, according to that of our Saviour, *John 15. 8. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much Fruit.* And thus also upon the Account of the Duty we owe to God, as well as that we owe to our Neighbour and our Selves, we are obliged to the Practice of religious Discourse, which now upon this threefold Ground appears to be a real Part of the Duty of Man.

I might further argue the same from the natural End and Use of *Speech*, which without Doubt was given us for higher and more material

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Purposes,

Purposes, than to drive Bargains upon the Exchange, or to talk Politicks over a News Letter, or to hold an impertinent Chat in gossiping Company about Cloaths and Fashions, and the little Affairs and Transactions of the Neighbourhood. 'Tis remarkable, that among all the Creatures of the World, Man is the only one that has Religion, and the only one too that has Speech, and is there not great Reason to think that one of these was naturally intended in order to the other? And what shall a Man talk of, what Subject is there that is worthy of his Discourse, if not that which is at once his *Perfection* and his *Distinction*.

BUT this Matter is sufficiently clear'd from Reason; all therefore that I shall further add in Confirmation of it shall be from *Scripture*. To this Purpose I might alledge that general Exhortation of our Saviour Christ, *Mat. 5. 16. Let your Light so shine before Men, that they may see your good Works, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven*; which without Doubt is as applicable to good Words, as to good Works, as being alike Exemplary, and alike tending to Edification. But I shall lay the Stress of the Matter upon two or three express Texts that speak more home to the Point, and indeed so home as to decide it. And first I take hold of those plain Words of St. Paul, *Eph. 4. 29. Let no corrupt Communication proceed out of your Mouth, but that which is good to the Use of edifying, that it may minister Grace unto the Hearers*. Again, says the Apostle, *Col. 4. 6. Let your Speech be alway with Grace, season'd with Salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every Man*. Again, *1 Thess. 5. 11. Wherefore comfort your selves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do*. And again, *Heb. 10. 24, 25. Let us consider one another, to provoke unto Love, and to good Works.---Exhorting one*

one another, &c. Than which few Texts nothing can be more plain, and 'tis no great Sign of our Reverence to holy Scripture that such plain and positive Injunctions of it should be so little regarded.

AND thus you see how both Reason and Scripture conspire to bind it as a Duty upon us, to season our Discourse with the Things of Religion, which is that *Salutare Condimentum*, that divine Salt, that will give a wholesome and relishing Savour to our Conversation, and withal (which is another Property of Salt) preserve our Graces from Corruption and Decay. And truly considering the Moment of the Things themselves, and the great Usefulness of talking of them, tho' there were nothing of Duty or Obligation in the Case, one would think that People should Discourse of little or nothing else, and should be so far from declining this important Subject in its proper Times and Places, that they should fall abruptly into it, force a Discourse of it, talk of it in Season, and (if that can be) out of Season too, with Occasion and without Occasion, and should even stop and lay hold on one another as they meet in the very Streets to talk of the great Concernments of Religion and of another Life (forgetting the little Trifles of this) so that the main Intercourse and Transaction of Mankind should be about the one Thing necessary, and the whole World should be but as one great *spiritual Exchange*.

WHY, thus I believe it will be under the glorious and happy Interval of the Church, when the true primitive Spirit of Christianity (which is now a Body without a Soul) shall revive, and the Antichristian one shall be destroy'd, when Truth and Righteousness shall return to the long forsaken Earth, and Devotion and Charity be set again upon the Throne. Then the Holy Spirit

of God will again descend in *Tongues of Fire*, and as the Minds of Men become more spiritual, and refine more and more from the Dregs of Earth, their Conversation shall still grow more divine and heavenly. Then will the present Impertinencies of Society be exchang'd for nobler Subjects of Discourse, and instead of the vain Trifles and Amusements of this World, the great Things of Religion and Heaven shall be the common Theme, which shall be talk'd of with all mutual Freedom and Temper, without Reserve, without Passion, without Affectation, and without any of those little Designs and Artifices which now both disguise and disrelish Conversation, and make Men suspicious and jealous of one another. All shall be then open, free and ingenuous, every Man's Heart a *thorough light* to every Man, as having no Fear of what is Bad, nor Shame of what is Good. So that they shall talk of what is best, in the best and most endearing Manner, till the Earth which is now polluted and profan'd with vain and wicked Conversation, shall be sanctify'd as it were into another Heaven, and the Conferences of Men shall be like the Discourses of Angels and glorified Spirits, *full of Grace and Truth*. Thus I say 'tis reasonable to think it will be, but in the mean Time, how would it both amaze and trouble any considering Man to see how this great and excellent Duty (for so I now call it) is neglected, how little Discourse there is of Religion passing in the Christian World, how shy, wary, and as it were ashamed Men are of it, how it is banish'd and excluded from all Company, and forc'd to retire into Churches for Sanctuary; in short, how it is not only carelessly omitted, but even industriously shunn'd and avoided, and that by Men otherwise good and pious, and whose particular Profession it may be, obliges them to
another

another Sort of Deportment? But I have drawn a sad and black *Night-piece* of this already, and therefore need not further illustrate it here. Only let me ask you what would you think of this Story I am about to tell you from an Author of great Wit and Observation? Two religious Persons, of an Order very austere, and whose Habit sufficiently signified the Austerity of it, had some Occasion to be at Court; where they happen'd to fall into Company with a Man of much Wit, and that pass'd with all for one of great Intelligence, was known to deal much in News, and to be able to tell it agreeably, and with a good Grace. Who seeing himself in Company with two such Pieces of Gravity, thought he must now act another Part, and so laying aside the usual Topicks of his Discourse, he talk'd to 'em of nothing but of Devotion and Piety. But he quickly found himself mistaken. For our holy Fathers perceiving that their Courtier and Statesman would tell them no News, and that he was for talking to them only of religious Matters, went out of the Room no less disgusted than disappointed. What, say they, as they were going out, does the Man take us for a Couple of Fools? Does he think we are good for nothing but Devotion?

M. de Villiers *Reflex. sur les Defauts d'autrui*, Vol. 2. p. 59.

G O O D for nothing but Devotion! Strange that Men should think themselves affronted by being counted devout, and thus cowardly disown and be ashamed of their Character and Profession, and that at the very Time when they wore the Signs and Badges of it upon their Backs! One would think it should be the Fashion for Men both to talk, and to be talkt with in their own Way, and about Things relating to their Profession. And so 'tis in all Things besides, in all Arts and Sciences,

ces, Trades, Callings, and Occupations of Life, except only in Religion, and here even the very Professors of it start back, and are struck dumb, will talk of any thing rather than of the best and greatest Subject, and which they are also suppos'd to understand best; and as some are said to glory in their Shame, so these are asham'd of their Glory. But yet however the Cause of Religion (thanks be to God) is not yet so desperate, but that she has some Friends left that dare and will stand by her, and are not afraid to wear her Colours, and publickly to own their Relation to her in the midst of a wicked and irreligious World. Which brings me to the last Thing propos'd, which was,

THIRDLY to shew that those
Part III. who are very good indeed, and have a due Sense of Religion, and a thorough Zeal for it, will shew it by their Discourse. I have already touch'd upon this in the Entrance upon this Subject, but shall now give it a more particular Consideration. And for the Proof of it we have a great deal of Reason, and (thanks be to God) some Experience. For tho' there are some Degrees of Goodness that will be overborn by the fore-mention'd Difficulties and Discouragements, yet there are some again that will not, but on the contrary will outweigh them, and prevail against them. To which agrees that of our Saviour, *out of the Abundance of the Heart the Mouth speaketh.* The Words have a particular Force and Emphasis in the Original, *ἐκ τῆς περισσεύουσης τῆς καρδίας*, out of the Overfulness, Redundancy, or Superfluity of the Heart. There are some Measures of Grace and Goodness which the Heart can hold in and keep to itself, but if larger Quantities be pour'd into it, it will run over, and discharge it
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self into the Tongue, and so tho' every Degree of Depth will not make it overflow, yet a very high and swelling Tide will, and out of the *Abundance* of the Heart the Mouth will be sure to speak.

FOR I consider in the first Place, that he that has a great Sense and Impression of Religion upon him, and whose Heart does thus *abound* with it, must have a great Measure of *Faith*. For Faith being the great Mother-Virtue, and the Head-spring of all that is Good in us, it must as all other Springs do, at least rise as high as the Streams that issue from it. The Thing I intend in plain Words, out of Figure, is this, that our Faith being the Principal and Foundation of our other good Works and Habits, it must bear Proportion with its Effects. So that he that has a great Measure of religious Impression upon his Heart, must have a Measure of Faith in Proportion to it. That is, he must firmly believe, and be thoroughly persuaded of the Truth of Religion, and of all the fundamental Points of it. And that not only habitually and in general, so as to be able to say *Amen* to the Creed when 'tis rehears'd, or to answer in the Affirmative to the Articles of it when he is put to the Question, *Dost thou believe*, &c. or to subscribe to it if occasion be to shew his Orthodoxy, and that he is no *Heretick*; (for he that has no Sense of Religion in his Heart, and makes no Conscience of it in his Life, may do all this) but also actually and in particular, that is, I mean, he must not only think thus of the Points of Religion whenever he thinks about them, but must also actually and effectually think of them, and have, as it were, a present View and Intuition of what he believes before him. He must be a Believer not only in *Habit*, so as to be denominated a Christian, and not a Jew or a Mahumetan, but in *Act*, so as to

be an attending and considering Christian. He must, in short, not only have a dormant and periodical Faith that returns upon him at some certain Seasons, and for the rest of the Time sleeps and slumbers in him, but a quick, lively, actual and awaken'd Faith, such a Faith as is next to Vision. As for Instance, The Existence of a future World; I suppose such a one not only to believe this habitually, that is, to be so far convinc'd of the Truth of the Proposition, as to be ready to subscribe to it whenever the Question is put to him, or if Occasion require, to write a Book in Defence of it, but to have the actual Thought of it residing in his Mind, to converse in the other World much after the same Manner as other Men do in this, to see it and feel it, and have as it were a spiritual Sensation of it; in short, to have it so intellectually present to him, and set before him, as scarce ever to lose either its View, or its Impression.

THIS is that Faith which overcomes the World, and very properly makes those that have it more than Conquerors. The steady View, or rather Possession they have of the other World gives them an easy Victory and a daily Triumph over this. And tho' this be a very high, I question not but that it is an attainable Degree of Faith, and that there are some in the World that have it. But now the Things of Religion are of such vast Importance, that if thus believ'd in the *Heart*, they will by their own Weight force their Way into the *Tongue*. Little Things may be easily suppress'd, or great Ones that are believ'd with a lazy and imperfect Faith, but 'tis impossible that such Things so believ'd should be kept to a Man's self. No, he will be so full of them, and so big with them, that he will even travail with the uneasy Burthen, and be in Pain till he be deliver'd of it. The great Things of the other
World

World will be like Fire within him, and will so warm and inflame him with their Heat, and so dazzle and overflow him with their Light and Glory, that he will be no more able to forbear talking of them, than *St. Stephen* when he look'd stedfastly into Heaven, and saw the Glory of God, and *Jesus* standing on his right Hand, could forbear crying out (tho' he knew he should further enrage his Enemies, and forfeit his Life by it) *Behold, I see the Heavens open'd, and the Son of Man standing on the right Hand of God.* Such irresistible Force and Efficacy have the great Objects of Religion as well upon the *Tongues* as upon the *Hearts* of Men, when they are set before them in the next View, and displaid in a full Light by that Faith which is the Substance of Things hop'd for, and the Evidence of Things not seen.

FOR I consider again that this actual and lively Faith suppos'd to be in him that has this great Sense and Impression of Religion upon him, will not only ravish and transport him with the glorious and beatifick Views of the other World, but will also (even by so doing) eclipse, extinguish, and utterly annihilate all that we call Great and Considerable in this. The Earth seems but as a Point to a mathematical Eye, and what then will it appear to the Eye of such a steddy and intent Believer? Why even just nothing. He sees its mighty Frame dissolving, and all its Pomp and Glory vanishing and disappearing, or rather he does not see it, but overlooks it, glances his piercing Eye beyond it, and casts it into a *Shade*, making it no Part of his enlarged Prospect. And when the whole World appears to him so inconsiderable, so next to nothing, how flat and insipid, how dead and unmoving must all Discourse of it be to him! and what Pleasure can such a one take to talk or be talk'd to an Hour or two together

ther about those trifling Subjects that find the Body of Mankind in Discourse, and give Entertainment to most Companies, and what a Pennance must it be to his spiritual and high-set Ear to be condemn'd to such Impertinence! And yet he cannot be wholly silent neither, but must even to keep himself awake, talk of something, and what should that be, since all worldly Subjects are so unfavoury to him, but of the great Things of Religion, whereof his Heart and Head too are full, and which imploy both his Meditation and his Affection.

I say *Affection*. For I further consider that Love is so talkative and self-betraying a Passion that it cannot well be conceal'd, when in any considerable Degree. Upon which Account, as well as some others, it is deservedly compared to *Fire*. 'Tis a Fire that not only burns, but flames out, and discovers it self by its own Light. Love is more capable of Hypocrisy, than of Disguisement, it being more easy to pretend and counterfeit it where it is not, than to conceal it where it is. A Man may indeed without much Difficulty, dissemble his Hatred, or his Envy, or his Malice, or even his very Anger; and 'tis no very rare thing to meet with a Sort of People that have the Art so to manage their Resentments, as to smile in a Man's Face at the very Time when they are the most bitterly affected towards him, and would do him the greatest Mischief. But Love will not be so managed, but like Lightning will break through all Restraints till it either finds or makes a Passage. 'Tis so we know in all worldly Objects, the Love of which is quickly known in those who have a Tongue to express it (which in these Cases at least) is always observ'd to be a true Index of the Heart. How easy a Matter is it to find out a *Lover* by an Hour's Conversation
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with him! And how quickly does a *covetous* Person betray himself, who can indeed hide his Money, but not his Love of it. For how feelingly and sensibly and cordially does he talk of it himself, and with what a true Gusto, and luscious Relish does he hear it talkt of by others! How often are Bills and Bonds, Principle and Interest, Leases, Fines, and Mortgages in his Mouth, and how does he even shake and tremble all over whenever he pronounces the sacred Name of his dear Idol, so that you may easily feel how the Pulse of his Heart beats, by the Motion of his Tongue. And why then should not the Love of God and of Religion be as active and powerful as that which is worldly or sensual? Without Question it would, if it were in the same Degree, and did Men but love God and Heaven at the same Rate as Misers do the World (and I hope there are some that do so, and a great deal more) they would be as forward to talk of these great Things, as the others are of the little Objects of their vile Passion. For why should the Divine Lover be the only one that's asham'd of his *best Affection*, and unwilling to talk of the Delight of his Heart?

ESPECIALLY when 'tis further consider'd that the excellent Person we are now speaking of, who has so great a Sense of Religion, and lives under so governing an Impression of it, has not only a great Love and Relish of Piety, but also a great deal of Charity for his Neighbour, and withal no less a Zeal for the Honour and Glory of God, which two last will be of as much Force to determine him to religious Discourse upon the Account of his Brother's Edification, as the former was to discharge himself of a full Burthen, and for the Ease of his own Heart and Mind. So that every Way it seems not only natural, but even necessary

necessary and unavoidable that those who are very good indeed, great Proficients in Piety, mature Saints, should frequently discourse of good Things, however Christians of a lower Form, and lesser Age, *Infants* in Religion, may not be yet arriv'd to the Use of their Speech.

AND does not the Scripture here also strike in with Reason when it makes religious-Discourse so considerable an Ingredient in the Character of a good Man? For says the royal Prophet of himself, and such as himself, *Psal. 119. I will speak of thy Testimonies even before Kings, and will not be ashamed.* And says his wise Son, *Prov. 10. 11, 21. The Mouth of a righteous Man is a Well of Life, not a standing Pool, but a Well, that is always springing and rising up, and the Lips of the Righteous feedeth many,* that is to be sure with good and wholesome Discourse. And this the Prophet *Malachy* represents not only by Way of Character, as a Thing that should be, but as Matter of Fact, as the actual Practice of the good Men of his Time. *Mal. 3. 16. Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another, and the Lord hearkened and heard it, and a Book of Remembrance was written before him, for them that feared the Lord, and thought upon his Name.* And, to add no more, our Saviour tells us in plain Words, *Mat. 12. 35. that a good Man, out of the good Treasure of the Heart bringeth forth good Things.* And to the like Purpose elsewhere, *Mat. 13. 52. he compares a good and a wise Man to an Houholder, which bringeth forth out of his Treasure Things new and old, that is, produces out of his rich Stock of Knowledge and Goodness, variety of spiritual Matter for the Entertainment and Edification of those that converse with him.*

AND thus you see, both from Reason and Scripture, that however the moderately Good
and

and Virtuous may be discourag'd from the Practice of religious Discourse, yet those that are eminently so, that are very much under the Power and Sense of Religion, will shew it by their good Words as well as by their good Works, upon all Occasions making Ladders from Earth to Heaven, and seasoning their Discourse with that divine Salt, without which nothing can be grateful and savoury to a truly pious and Christian Palate. But then if all very good Men will conduct and order their Conversation thus, I leave it to be concluded by the Way, considering how little good Discourse there is going, what a few very good Men there are in the World. These indeed were always very thin sown, but never certainly so thin as now, and accordingly never was Religion so little talkt of as now. Disputed it is enough, perhaps too much, but as for serious and practical Discourse of it, such as comes from a Principle of Goodness, and tends to the Promotion of it, I think 'tis almost quite laid aside. And yet some few there are upon whom the Divine Spirit does yet descend in Tongues of Fire, who are both burning and shining Lights, have both Devotion and Courage enough to utter the wonderful Works of God, and whose Communication (as the Son of *Sirach* advises, c. 9. v. 15.) is in the Law of the Most High. And these are they that bear up the sinking Foundations of the moral World, that keep Life and Breath in the Body of languishing and dying Piety, that maintain a Sense and Remembrance of it in the Minds of Men, who would otherwise forget what Religion meant. And as the Number of these holy and righteous Persons shall either increase or decrease, so in all human Probability will the Tide of Religion (now almost at lowest) either ebb or flow.

*Directions for
the Ordering
our religious
Discourse.*

I see now nothing further wanting to the Intireness of this Discourse, unless it be to lay down some Rules and Directions for the better Management of our religious Conversation. Whereof the First that I would commend and have observ'd is this,

1. *Never to talk of Religion but when you think of it.* 'Twere well if you thought of it some Time before hand, by Way of Preparation, but that you do so at the very Time when you talk of it, is, I think, absolutely necessary. The Importance of the Subject is certainly great enough to demand this Caution, only perhaps it may be thought too great to need it. But that's a Mistake, for there are a Sort of People in the World that have such a lazy, unthoughtful, listless, yawning Way of talking of Religion, that one would almost think they talk'd in their Sleep. They have a Road of pious Expressions, and are got into a certain Set of good Words, such as *Lord Jesus Christ, What please God, The Lord's Will be done, We are all Mortal*, and the like; which upon all Occasions they go over by rote, just as a Seaman does his Compass, or rather as a Bellman does his godly Rhimes, without thinking what they say, or being at all affected with it. Methinks when I hear such People talk of Religion, I fancy the Chimes going to the Tune of a Psalm. The Truth is, there is but too much Resemblance between them, they both go as they are set, and one almost as mechanically as the other. Only there is this unhappy Difference in the Case, that the Bells oftentimes call People to their Devotion, whereas these sleepy, dreaming Talkers of Religion do but make 'em sick of it. Whenever therefore you talk of Religion, in the first Place

be sure to be *awake*, and to think and consider of what you say. The next Thing I would commend, by Way of Direction, is,

2. To talk of it *seriously, gravely, and soberly*, towards which the Consideration of what is spoken will be a very great Help and Advantage. There are two Sorts of People that transgress this Rule, in discoursing of Religion: Those that talk of it *irreverently*, and with a loose and careless Air, as if they thought it a Trifle, hardly worthy of spending their Breath about it; and those that talk of it *precisely*, after a canting, whining, and sighing Manner, with an affected Tone, and an ill-contriv'd Look, as if they were conjuring or telling Fortunes, rather than discoursing of holy Things. Now tho' these are Persons of a Character very different from one another, yet I think they both agree in this, that instead of advantaging the Interest of Religion, they do but prostitute, profane, and make it cheap, and set the Taste of those of good Sense against it, who cannot indure to see so serious and sacred a Thing as Religion is, either unhallow'd, or ridicul'd. I would therefore have Religion talk'd of, First reverently and seriously, in Opposition to the Way of the *Liber-tine*; and then gravely and soberly and manly, in Opposition to that of the *Pharisee*, without any sighing, or winking, or catching the Breath, or *skreewing* up the Mouth, or any other fantastick *Affectations*. For all this is but the *Grimace* of Religion, such as is forc'd and put on by those that have it not in its true Power and Spirit, and which those that have it do not find Occasion or Inclination to use. For intending only to express what they feel, and what really passes in their Souls, they content themselves with the natural Way of doing it, which is simple and plain; whereas the other not speaking from an inward

Fund of Goodness, but being only to act a Part, are apt (as having no certain Measure) to over-act it, and so run into Affectations. The Substance and Intendment therefore of this Rule, in short is, *So to talk of Religion, as not to betray the Want of it by your Talk.* For another Direction I would commend

3. **T H A T** Religion be discours'd of *Practically*. And that both as to the Matter, and as to the Manner, wherein I intend to exclude the Way of *Notion*, and the Way of *Contention*, the former not tending much to the promoting of Edification, and the latter being always an Hindrance to it. When we talk of Religion, we should remember the Design of it, and accordingly discourse of it, not notionally and speculatively, nor yet wranglingly and contentiously, either to shew our own Skill in arguing, or to try anothers, but cordially and spiritually, Christianly and devoutly, after a plain, hearty, and affectionate Manner, so as to answer the Ends of that Charity which edifies, and not of that vain Knowledge which puffeth up. Controversies do but little Good even in *Writing*, wherein Victory is oftner sought than Truth, but much less when manag'd by the Tongue, there being but very few that have either Art enough to talk closely, or Temper enough to talk calmly upon those short Views, and that very broken and transient Consideration of the Subject which are allow'd in the Way of Oral Discourse, especially in common Conversation. And there is nothing more indecent than to see People grow warm and out of Humour, much more to be noisy and clamorous, and in a Passion about Religion. 'Tis indeed unbecoming enough at any Time, or upon any Occasion, but never does it sit worse upon Men than when they make that the Subject of their fierce Contentions, which ought to be the
Cure

Cure of them. But to give Religion yet a further Advantage from our Mouths 'twere well if Care were taken,

4. THAT it be discours'd of *Seasonably*. The wise Man tells us that to every Thing there is a Season, and withal that every Thing is beautiful in its Time. Not that it can ever be out of Season to do Good, but only that there are some Seasons and Circumstances wherein Discourses of Religion are not so apt nor likely to do it. And these Seasons ought carefully to be avoided, and fit and proper ones chosen for this Purpose. For there is Prudence and Management in all Things, and if we make choice of a convenient Time to give Physick to a Man's Body, much more should we when we administer to his Soul. And that I call a convenient Time, when 'tis likely Men will be the better for what is said to them, let it be when it will. For there are Times again when Men are not likely to be the better, but rather the worse, and to talk Religion to them then, is both to spill your Physick and to injure your Patient. Upon which Consideration perhaps it would not do so well to fall aboard a Man abruptly, and chop down right into a Discourse about Religion with him, without some Occasion or other, either naturally offer'd, or artificially contriv'd. For that looks either like Pharisaical Ostentation of Religion on your side, or as if you thought the Person you bespeak in too great a Necessity of such an Application. Neither of which can be very acceptable to him. No, there are Ways of Address and sweet Insinuation that may be us'd both more acceptably, and more successfully, whereof we have Variety of Instances in the Conversation of our Saviour Christ, and particularly in his Inter-course with the *Woman of Samaria*. Again, For the same Reason, tho' there be Occasion offer'd,

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perhaps

perhaps it would not be so convenient to take hold of it in a great and promiscuous Company, whose Tempers and Humours you know not, lest they should be more offended with your Shew of Ostentation, than edify'd with the real Goodness of your Discourse. Nor again, it may be, would a wise Man be very free of Religion at a publick Feast, when besides the Number and the Mixture of the Company, People are commonly dispos'd to greater Freedom and Pleasantry than is consistent with the Gravity of such serious Discourses. Nor again would I have Religion mingled with our *Sports*, nor with the Hurry and Noise of *Business*, nor with our *Drink*. For what an odd Thing would it be to hear a Man come out bluntly with Religion, or begin a Discourse about Heaven when he is a Hunting, and the Dogs at full Cry, or when he is dealing and trading upon the *Exchange*, or when he is making himself chearful in a Tavern. I say *Chearful*, for tho' he be not drunk, yet Religion and a Bottle make but a very indifferent Mixture, insomuch that the Indecency of it is got into a Proverb, which forbids *Preaching over one's Glass*. But there is another Sort of mingling of Religion, and that is, when we sow and scatter it here and there among our worldly Talk, without observing due Distances between them, after the Manner of those who will talk a little of Religion, and then a little of News, Business, or Fashions, and then a little of Religion again; so chequering and interlacing their Discourse with these two extremely different Subjects. But this is an unbecoming Mixture, and such as does not well comport with the Dignity of Religion, whose Sacredness implies *Separation*; and requires it should be discours'd of alone, and by it self. We are also to consider to whom we speak, and not talk Religion to a Man that is drunk, or in a great Passion,

Passion, or who professedly scoffs and laughs at all Religion, and those that talk of it, making them both the Object of his Mockery and Ridicule. For this would be in our Saviour's Expression, to cast Pearls before Swine, which one would not do, not only for the Value or the *Pearls*, but also out of some Pity and tender Regard to the *Swine* too, considering how much our good Discourses will inflame the Reckoning, and aggravate the Condemnation of those wicked Wretches, whom they do not amend, or by Accident make worse. The short then of this Rule is, that we take Care, so to time, accommodate, and circumstantiate our good Discourses, that they may really do Good, and make those to whom they are address'd the better for them. Which Caution ought more particularly to be observ'd in that nicer and more delicate Part of religious Discourse, which consists in *Reproof* and Brotherly Admonition, for which (as being an ungrateful Work and Labour of Love) the softest and most favourable Seasons are to be sought out, the *Mollia Tempora Fandi*, when Men are most treatable and best dispos'd, most sedate and recollected; and when this harsher Physick will work most kindly with them. And for this we have the Example of God himself, who seems to have us'd the like Address towards the first Offender, chusing to treat with him about his Miscarriage, not immediately upon the Commission of it, when his Passions were up, and his Soul ruffled and discompos'd, but, as is most probable, at some convenient Distance, and after some Time of Recollection, when the Sediment of his troubled Spirit was saln, and the Regions of his Soul pretty well clear'd up, *in the Cool of the Day*. I shall now add but one Direction more concerning the Management of religious Discourse, and that is,

5. To join along with it the great Advantage of a good Life, which will give Weight to our Words, and Attention to our Hearers, and is it self, whether in the Pulpit or out of it, the best Eloquence. With this, nothing so mean or ordinary can come from us but what will carry a Grace and an Authority with it, and will be well accepted. But without it, tho' we speak with the Tongues of Men and of Angels, we shall be but as sounding Brass, and a tinkling Cymbal. I say tho' we *should* so speak. But then again I must tell you, that 'tis no very easy Matter for an ill Man to do so. For being a Stranger to the inward Life and Power of Religion, he can hardly be suppos'd to know enough of it to talk well of it, nor again is it likely he should have Courage enough to speak out all that he knows, because the greatest Part of it will recoil upon himself. But suppose he should be able to get over these two Difficulties, yet after all, the best that he can say, will have but little Power to persuade, and that because he says it, who is not himself persuaded by it. If therefore you would have your good Discourse have as good Success, take Care that your Hands do not contradict your Tongue, that your Deeds give not the Lie to your Words, and that you live yourself as you exhort others. Which Direction, tho' the last set down, is yet the first I would have follow'd.

THERE are some whom if you were to hear talk a little While, and knew no more of them, you would think they were Saints newly dropt from Heaven, and that they had nothing of *Adam* in them. So charmingly set and spiritually tun'd are their Tongues, and so divine and full of heavenly Air is their Discourse. And thus far 'tis well. But when after having heard their seraphic Voice, a Man should look down and behold
their

their cloven Feet, and shall observe, that those who talk the Language of *Angels*, do yet hardly live the Life of *Men*, What a Surprize, and what a Scandal must such a Discovery be ! I say *Scandal*, for nothing brings a greater upon Religion than a Hypocrite discover'd. As long as he keeps on his Disguise 'tis well enough, but when that's off, he is like a Sepulchre uncover'd, all over Offence and Abomination, and even good Men are thought the worse for his Sake. Those that have once found a pious Talker to be an ill Liver, are apt, ever after, so to join those Ideas together as to fancy they are all alike ; and will be hardly persuaded to trust a Man of a *Religious Outside* any more. However, to be sure he himself will never be thought well of again, and if he should chance to be reform'd in earnest, he can never hope to convince those that knew him before of the Reality of his Change, it being impossible he should do it by greater Tokens of Sanctity and Professions of Piety than he gave out before, when he was known to be no more than a *Pretender*. Such a one therefore he will be ever taken to be, and as long as that Presumption lies upon him, he must not expect to do any Good by the most heavenly Discourses his Head can invent, or his Tongue can utter. His foul Actions will continually baffle all his fine Harangues, and what was impiously alledg'd against our Saviour, will be a just and reasonable Prejudice here, *John 10. 10. He hath a Devil, Why hear ye him?*

BUT the Truth of it is, these Men were much better let all Discourse about Religion alone, and leave it to shift for it self, than to pretend to stay up her tottering Ark with their unhallow'd Hands. They do but discredit and profane it, and bring an ill Report upon it, and withal discourage those Few from talking of it who could do it to better Purpose,

246 *Of Religious Discourse, &c.*

Purpose, but will not, for fear they should be taken for Hypocrites too, as was remark'd in the Beginning. And besides, one would think it should be a Punishment to them to talk of Things they have no true Delight in, or Relish for, and which recoil again upon their guilty, and perhaps, blushing Faces. However, to be sure they can't do it with that open Freedom, that liberal Assurance, and that ingenious Air which all Discourse about Religion should have, and which a clear and good Conscience can only give. Which puts me in mind of a very pertinent Saying of St. Austin, spoken in relation to that Petition of the Lord's Prayer which is by so many turn'd into a Curse upon themselves, *Forgive us our Trespases,*

Tom. 8. in Psal. 103. p. 426. *as we forgive them that trespass against us. Vis Securus dicere? says he, Fac quod dicis. Would you say it securely? then do what you say.*

And the same I apply to Discourse about Religion. Would you talk of it securely, with true Freedom and Assurance, without any secret Checks, or faint-hearted Misgivings? The Rule is both short and infallible, *Fac quod dicis.* Do what you say. Practise as much of Religion as you talk, and then you have a full Licence to talk as much of it as you please.

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